

‘SDS’ and ‘SDC’ Dies.

The subject of ‘*Early Stamp Booklets*’ was featured in the Perfin Society’s non-competitive sixty-four page exhibit at ‘*The Stamp Show 2000*’. The original two pages, 19 & 20, have been used as the basis for this study, with additional information from various Perfin Society Bulletins (mainly written by *Rosemary Smith*) now that space isn’t a constraint.

Trials of Automatic Postage Stamp Delivery.

Early in 1889 Mr W Maysmor Williams wrote to the Postmaster-General, The Rt Hon H C Raikes, MP, requesting an interview to discuss the project. As a result, the PMG granted permission to affix **six** Collins Automatic Stamp Delivery Machines, experimentally, in London. The machines were to be placed ‘Within Six Months’ or the permission would lapse. The patentee (Mr Collins) made application for the registration of a trade-mark with the slogan ‘**FROM PILLAR TO POST**’. However, the PMG raised an objection on the grounds that the slogan ‘... *had been in common use since the earliest days of racing, and therefore might be misconstrued by the general public*’. The objection was upheld and in consequence of these protracted deliberations the machines were not affixed within the time limit imposed and the concession to Mr Collins lapsed.

However, on 3rd November 1890, permission was revived in favour of Mr Maysmor Williams, who exercised his concession through a company formed on 12th February 1891 with a nominal capital of £20,000 with the ‘... *object of issuing stamp booklets through vending machines*’. The company was registered as ***The Stamp Distribution Syndicate Ltd*** with offices at 11 Queen Victoria Street, London EC. The allocation of machines was increased from Six to Ten.

Extract from Gibbons’ Monthly Journal (May 1951) - from the ‘Standard’, 30th April 1891.

The authorities of the General Post Office having sanctioned, as a trial, the addition of an automatic postage stamp delivery box to their pillar-posts in Bedford and Cavendish Squares, the Houses of Parliament, Grosvenor Hotel, Kensington, Stroudgreen and Hornsey, invitations were given yesterday by the Stamp Distribution Syndicate for an inspection of two pillar-posts so fitted at the Post Office buildings at Mount-pleasant, in Farringdon Road. Colonel Brodhurst, Mr Jeffrey Herbert and Mr Arthur Hollinshead, directors, attended to receive the visitors. The automatic boxes are about eighteen inches long by six broad and four deep, thus only extending about an inch beyond the top overhand of the posts to which they are attached, on the side most protected from street traffic. A great deal of attention has been bestowed upon their construction and they will reject both lead and iron discs - delivering only to a legitimate penny. The stamp is placed in a notch cut diagonally in the cover of a handy little memorandum book, which contains advertisements on every other page, the rest being left blank for notes, except three or four, on which are given postal instructions and other useful information. Each of these little books is put in a corresponding envelope, in which four holes are punched to show the stamp. The delivery is neatly effected at the back of the box on the plug being pulled out in front after the penny has been put in the slot, and then pushed slowly back again. The envelope prevents the single stamp from being dropped and lost or blown away by the wind. The book itself may be used as material for a hasty letter, the envelope being sealed down, addressed and put into the very pillar-box from which it was obtained.

A further quotation appeared in a later issue.

The Stamp Distribution Co Ltd, has just been formed with a capital of £150,000 and with Mr J Henniker Heaton, MP as chairman. The object of the company is to develop the scheme - recently tried in London - for the automatic delivery of postage stamps at all hours of the day and night by means of specially constructed machines. The Post-master General has given his consent to machines being fixed to the receiving offices in the United Kingdom. To show how useful this will be we may mention that the trial machine sold an average of 400 stamps per week after the ordinary post offices were closed (that is between 8 pm and 8 am). On placing a penny in the slot the machines will deliver a penny stamp, memorandum book, and envelope and the profits of the company are expected to be made from the advertisements and from the sale of the Patent Rights for various parts of the country.

Early ‘Memoranda’ Booklets.

The first G.B. Postage Stamp Booklets went on sale to the public on 2nd May 1891, although only available through an automatic vending machine. The company responsible for the venture, ***The Stamp Distribution Syndicate Ltd***, was formed on 12th February 1891, with offices at 11 Queen Victoria St, London EC.

The ‘***Memoranda***’ booklet (two different examples are shown below) contained 64 pages of advertising and writing space, along with a 1d Lilac postage stamp, perforated with the initials “SDS”, inserted into a diagonal slot in the back cover. The whole was contained in a small envelope and cost one penny. I believe the envelope ‘tab’, torn off in the illustration below, was also perforated “SDS”. The four large circular holes in the envelope flap allowed a glimpse of the 1d Lilac stamp.



The fact that all this was obtainable by putting one penny in the machine brought the following comment from the ***Leeds Daily News*** of 4th May 1891:

‘... the fact is that he who puts a penny in the slot will get a better bargain than he who pays for it over the counter!’

This second style of booklet uses the same ‘Memoranda’ script/font as its predecessor, but now carries advertisements on the cover. The assumption is that the mint one penny stamp is correct for this particular book!



Post Office records hold a detailed document showing that some 161,492* books were sold between 2 May and 6 August 1891 - an average of 3,103* books each day. These figures must have been very satisfactory, for in August Maysmor Williams further requested the PMG ‘for a *GENERAL CONCESSION* to operate throughout the Country, as he could then form a large Company, for which we have promise of Capital ...’. The request was granted, but later revoked. {* I make it 1,665 books on average throughout the 97 day period}.

Postmarks on used examples are *usually* from London, which is where the dispensing machines were located.

1891-1892



S2200.01

The first of the examples above was used in London NW, and has a late date of **MY 23/92**, the second (albeit poor) was used in Northallerton (Duplex 569). Known dates range between the **11th August 1891** and the **23rd May 1892** (just 3 days before the concession was terminated).

After some initial success, the machines became troublesome giving rise to complaints from the general public to the Postmaster General. This resulted in the termination of the concession on the **26th May 1892**, and the voluntary liquidation of *The Stamp Distribution Syndicate Ltd.*

The machines were in operation for around 330 days, which at the 3,103* books/day quoted earlier totals 1,023,990 stamps perfinned “SDS”. Realistically, perhaps somewhere between 400,000 and 800,000 stamps perforated “SDS” were dispensed, compared to the countless millions of 1d Lilacs sold ‘over the counter’ at Post Offices throughout the same period.

The Second Stamp Book.

One day *before* the concession was terminated with *The Stamp Distribution Syndicate Ltd*, another company was formed to acquire their rights and interests - *The Stamp Distribution (Parent) Co Ltd*, based at 143A Holborn, London EC. A well-known Postal Reformer of the day, John Henniker Heaton MP, was chairman of the new company. When the operation began in 1892, they used a different type of vending machine. This machine was described in a promotional booklet and lists 138 machines, ‘fixed and in full working order’, in the London area, Ipswich, Margate and Ramsgate. A system of issuing licences for subsidiary companies to operate in various parts of the country was also set up.

At the opening of the SDC's new premises on 14th October 1892, it was reported that the average number of books sold per day was 260 per machine and the net profit of 17/6d per 1,000 books, each machine would realise a net profit of over 4/6d per day.

The SDC continued to operate until 1895 when a petition for winding-up was made on the 13th March. The company was wound up in May 1895.

Notably, the 1d lilac stamps were printed by De La Rue, but it's curious that Harrison & Sons, who did not print stamps themselves until 1911, were the Petitioners for the winding-up of the SDC! The ending of the story is reported as ‘*the liquidator was released in November 1898, but the name of the Company was not removed from the Register until 1907*’.

The ‘*Memo Book*’ was similar to its predecessor, except that the 1d Lilac postage stamp and envelope ‘tab’ were now perforated “SDC”.



Records show that the print run was 25,000 booklets for each series. Potentially each print run could be different depending on who had paid for advertising.

A newspaper report of the day said:

*In connection with the above company (SDC) it may be mentioned that **The Northern Counties Stamp Distribution Company Ltd** has been formed with a capital of £75,000 for the purpose of acquiring the exclusive licenses to them to work in the six Northern Counties of England, viz:- Northumberland, Westmoreland, Durham, Yorkshire and Lancashire, as also the Isle of Man.*

Although scarce, the “SDC” die is much easier to come by than “SDS”, with known dates ranging between 5th April 1893 and 23rd October 1895.

1893-1895



S2060.01M

Subtle variations point to a multiheaded die, hence the suffix ‘M’ has been added to the catalogue number. For example, the illustration alongside shows a bigger gap to the base of the “S” and a different shape to the “D” when compared to the main image. Unusually, an example has also been reported with a pin missing from the “C”.

Known postmarks include:

‘19’ (Finsbury P)ark S.O., ‘46/B’ (Fulham), ‘72’ (West Norwood), ‘62’ (Belfast), ‘156’ (Cork), ‘186’ (Dublin), ‘303’ (Limerick), ‘583’ (Nottin)gham, ‘830’ (Uxbridge), Acton, ‘B60’ Bournemouth S.O., Cardiff, Chatham, Holloway, Ipswich, (Lond)on E, London SE, (London) SW, and ...chester.

Does anyone have an example with a Scottish postmark?



Of particular interest is this example, one of four reported used in Ireland, which is cancelled with the ‘156’ Diamond Duplex for Cork >>>



This cover (a shame it's not an entire) has a note added to the top of the front of the envelope which might need a little bit of explaining!



The letter was posted in Harrow to a 'Mrs Berger' at the 'Old Faskally', Killiecrankie, Perthshire, N.B. (North Britain) on 15th October 1893. The faded m/s note in ink at the top of the envelope reads *'Plays "fives" instead of football'* followed by the date *'Oct 15/1893'*. The reverse has a coat of arms with the motto 'Stet Fortuna Domus' (Let the Fortune of the House Stand), which is the motto of Harrow School. Presumably this is a letter home from a boarder to his mother. The letter was received in Pitlochry the next day.

'Old Faskally' is a 'C' listed Laird's house set in 2½ acres, close to the Pass of Killiecrankie, now owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland. Cover measures 105mm x 83mm.

Harrow School is an independent boarding school for boys, founded in 1572 by John Lyon under a Royal Charter of Elizabeth I. It is one of the original seven public schools that were regulated by the Public Schools Act 1868.

'Fives' is an English sport - a ball game played with hands or bat in a court with two, three or four walls. There is a piece on the Internet about Harrow School celebrating '150 years of Fives' on 18th September 2017, making the inaugural match taking place in 1867. However, the same piece also mentions the first Eton courts were in 1865, and that the top six Eton courts were built 1889-1890, so shortly before the writer penned his declaration for *'Fives' instead of 'football'*. Another write-up states that the very first Eton Fives courts were built in 1840.

And finally, if you can add anything new to the study, *please let the Catalogue Editor know!*

Information correct to *1st January 2019*.